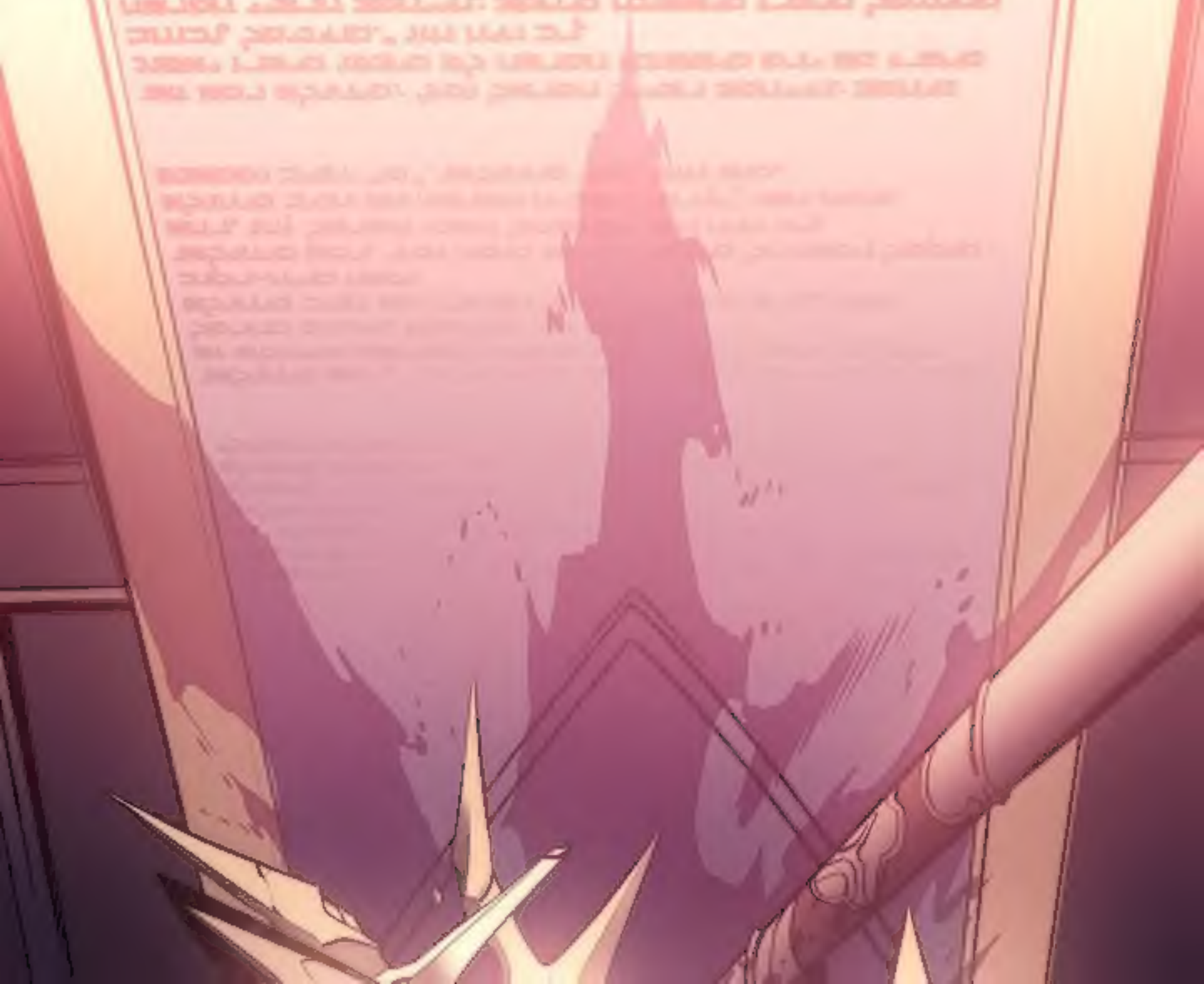




...BY THE TIME I
RETURNED, EVERYTHING
WAS ALREADY OVER.





Solo Leveling

Art · DUBU (REDICE STUDIO)

Original Novel · Chugong

Story · h-goon

163

THE FRAGMENTS OF
BRILLIANT LIGHT HAD KILLED
THE ABSOLUTE BEING. AFTER
ASSUMING THE POSITION OF
GODS, THEY BECAME THE
"RULERS"...

...AND BEGAN TO ATTACK
THE MONARCHS USING
DEVICES THAT CONTAINED
THE ABSOLUTE BEING'S
POWER.





LEGIA, THE KING OF GIANTS
AND THE MONARCH OF THE
BEGINNING, WAS CAPTURED
AS A RESULT...




...AND THE
BALANCE OF POWER
COLLAPSED.

THAT'S WHEN
THE MONARCHS
REALIZED THE
GRAVITY OF THE
SITUATION.

SO I SEIZED
THAT CHANCE
TO REACH OUT
TO THEM.



IN ORDER TO FACE
OFF AGAINST THE
RULERS, THEY ALSO
HAD NO CHOICE BUT
TO JOIN FORCES
WITH ME.



FROM THEN ON,
I FOUGHT THE LENGTHY
BATTLE ALONGSIDE THE
NINE MONARCHS...

...NOT AS A FRAGMENT OF
BRILLIANT LIGHT, OR AS A
MESSENGER OF GOD, BUT
AS *THE MONARCH OF
SHADOWS.*

TIME WAS ON MY SIDE.
THE CORPSES AND
SOULS LEFT ON THE
BATTLEFIELD BECAME
MY ARMY.



WHEN I CAME
TO STAND SHOULDER TO
SHOULDER WITH THE ARMY
OF DESTRUCTION LED BY
THE KING OF BERSERK
DRAGONS,

THE RULERS,
AS WELL AS THE
MONARCHS, CAME
TO FEAR ME...



EVENTUALLY, TWO OF
THE MONARCHS JOINED
HANDS TO BRING ME

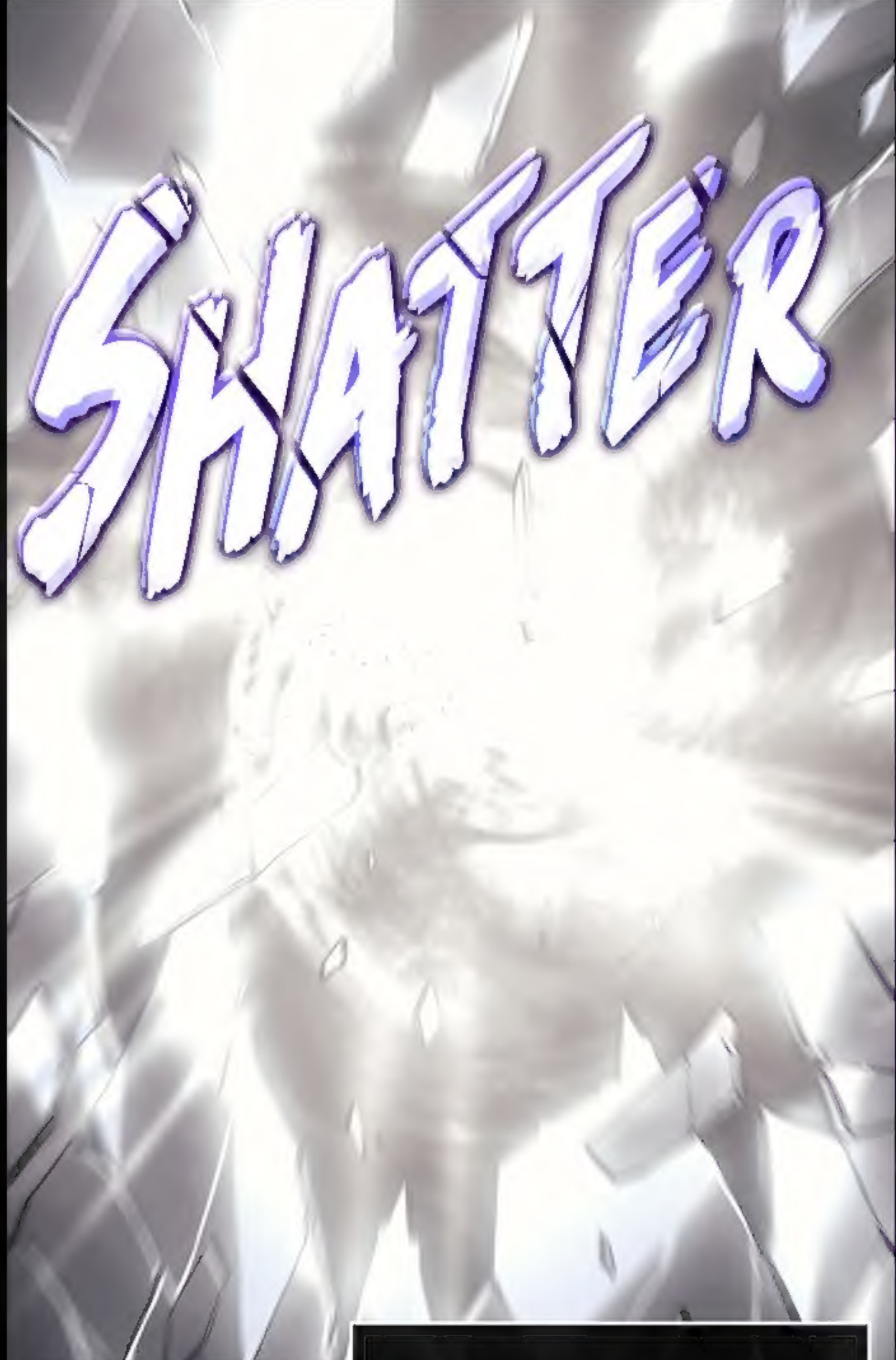
DOWN.

MY ARMY WAS NEARLY
OBLITERATED.

MY EXCESSIVE POWER
HAD BROUGHT ABOUT
BETRAYAL.



WHILE THE MONARCH
OF FANGS ABANDONED
HIS TROOPS AND RAN
AWAY,



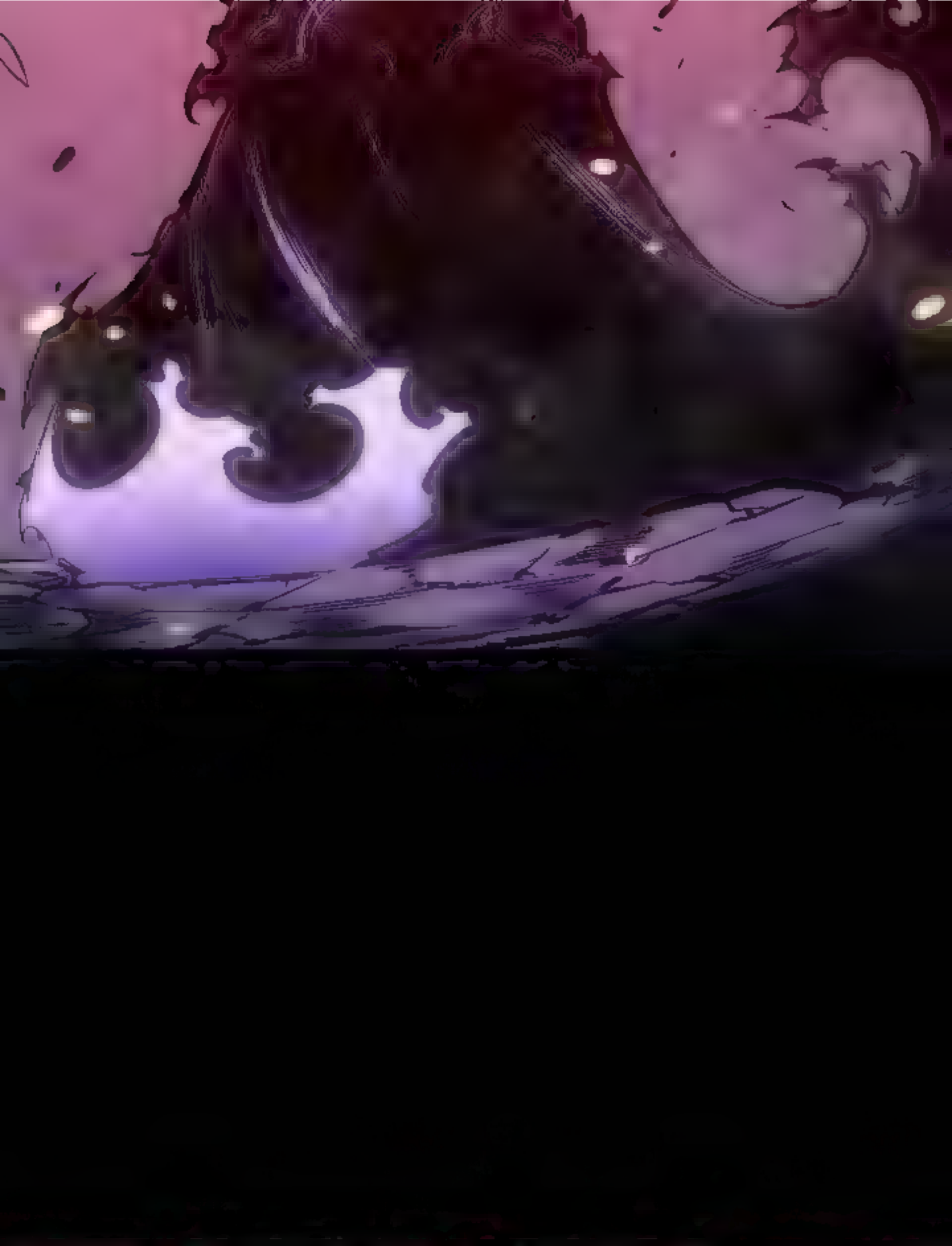
BARAN, THE
MONARCH OF WHITE
FLAMES AND THE
KING OF DEMONS,
PAID THE PRICE.

AND THEN...



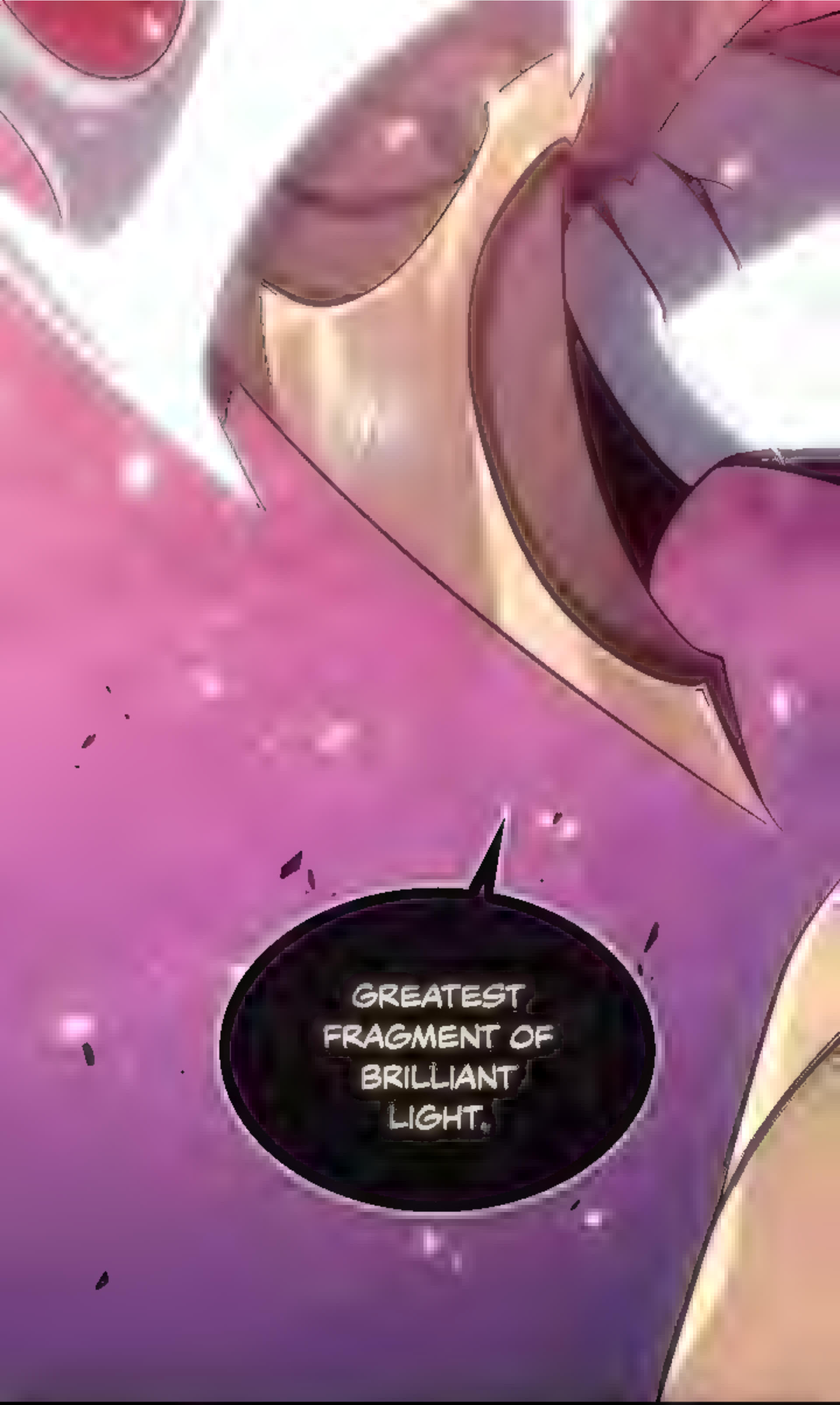









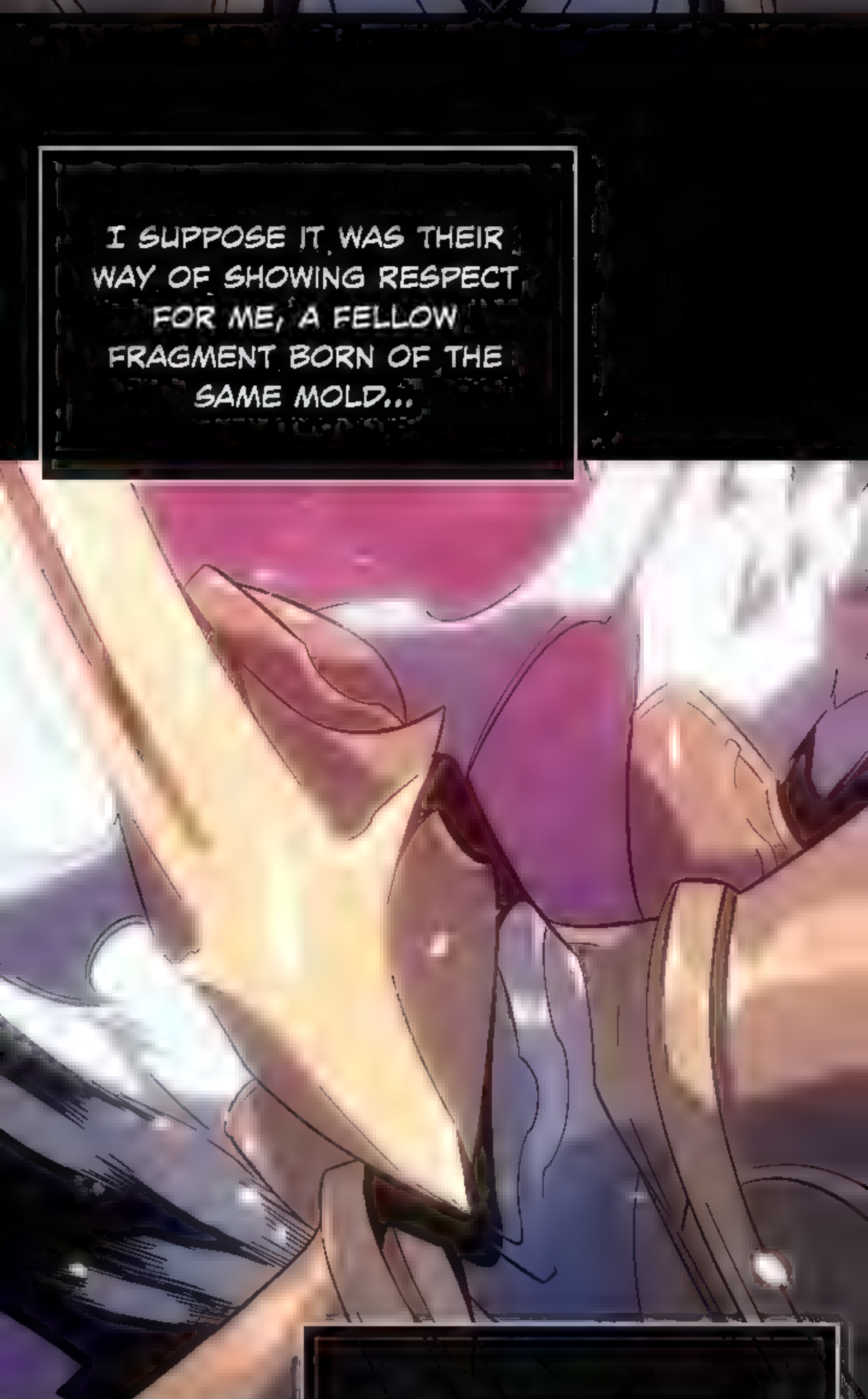
PLEASE
FORGIVE US
NOW.





ALTHOUGH THEY
WERE CAPABLE OF
SENDING ME BACK
TO NOTHINGNESS,

THEY WISHED
TO MAKE PEACE
WITH ME.



I SUPPOSE IT WAS THEIR
WAY OF SHOWING RESPECT
FOR ME, A FELLOW
FRAGMENT BORN OF THE
SAME MOLD...

...WHO HAD ONCE
LED THE ARMY OF
BRILLIANT LIGHT ON
THE FRONTLINES.



NO REASON,
YOU SAY?!

YOUR SWORDS
AND SPEARS
STRUCK DOWN
MY MASTER!



HE WAS OUR
MASTER, TOO.



GRAB



THAT IS WHAT
MAKES YOUR
CRIMES THAT
MUCH MORE
HEINOUS!



YOU KNOW
BETTER THAN
ANYONE

...HOW WE FELT
WHEN WE ROSE IN
REVOLT AGAINST
HIM.

ALL WE
WANTED WAS

WANTED WAS
TO END THIS
WAR.

PIERCE MY HEART
WITH YOUR SPEARS.
THAT IS THE "END"
YOU SEEK!

THEN YOU
WILL EMERGE AS
THE VICTORS OF
THIS WAR!!

PLEASE FIND IT
IN YOUR HEART TO
FORGIVE US.

HURRY UP AND
KILL ME NOW!!

PLEASE LET
GO OF YOUR
ANGER...

CLUNK

...GREATEST
FRAGMENT OF
BRILLIANT
LIGHT.

CLUNK


CLUNK



I WAS
CONFUSED.

FWISH

I COULDN'T
COME UP WITH
A SINGLE
SOLUTION.




SO I DECIDED TO
GO INTO HIDING IN
ORDER TO PLAN
MY REVENGE.

SINCE I HAD
CONFINED THE
MONARCH OF WHITE
FLAMES WITHIN MY
SHADOW,

I PLANNED TO
ATTACK THE MONARCH
OF FANGS' ARMY AFTER
LETTING MY BODY
RECOVER.


BUT WHILE
I WAS IN HIDING, THE
MONARCHS, WHO HAD LOST
AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF
COMBAT POWER, WERE
DEFEATED BY THE
RULERS.

WHEN
I REAPPEARED IN
FRONT OF THE MONARCHS
WHO HAD ESCAPED TO
A GAP BETWEEN
DIMENSIONS,




THE DRAGON KING
KNEW IT WAS TIME FOR
THEM TO BOOST THEIR
COMBAT POWER, SO HE
PREVENTED US FROM
FIGHTING...

...AND GLADLY
ACCEPTED ME.



WE THEN SOUGHT OUT A
WORLD WHERE WE COULD
BUILD A NEW ARMY OUT OF
THE RULERS' SIGHT.

The top panel of the comic shows two men standing in a dark, industrial environment. On the left, a man in a dark suit and tie stands with his hands in his pockets. On the right, a man in a dark coat over a light-colored shirt stands with his hands in his pockets. A large, dark, circular speech bubble is positioned above them, containing the text: "WE THEN SOUGHT OUT A WORLD WHERE WE COULD BUILD A NEW ARMY OUT OF THE RULERS' SIGHT."




YOU MEAN
EARTH?

The middle panel of the comic shows a man in a dark suit standing on a large, yellow, cratered planet. In the background, a city with a large, circular, metallic structure is visible. A speech bubble is positioned above the man, containing the text: "YOU MEAN EARTH?"

YES. THE ARRIVAL
OF THE MONARCHS
MUST'VE BEEN
UNPRECEDENTED
TO MANKIND.

THEIR
ANNIHILATION WAS
INEVITABLE.

A large, intense fire consumes a city. In the upper right, a building with a distinctive lattice-patterned roof is partially visible, its lower sections obscured by the flames. The fire is a mix of bright yellow and orange, with thick black smoke rising from it. The overall scene is one of total destruction.

A CITY
ENGULFED
IN A SEA OF
FLAMES...

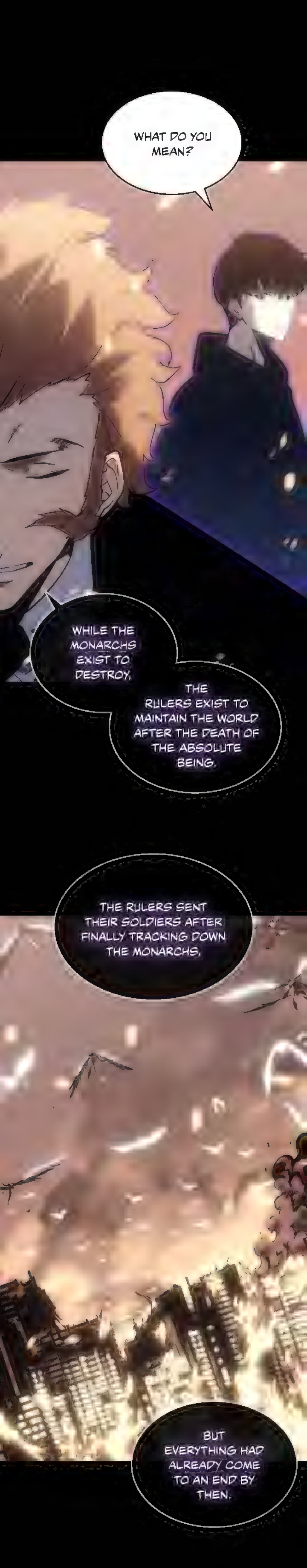
I'VE SEEN THIS
BEFORE.

*THE DEMONS'
CASTLE.*

Two men in dark suits and white shirts are shown from the chest up, looking upwards towards the burning city. The man on the left has dark hair and a serious expression. The man on the right has a more pointed, fox-like head with red eyes. They are both looking up with expressions of concern and contemplation. The background is the same fiery city scene.

IS THIS WHAT
THE FUTURE
HOLDS?

NO, YOU'RE
LOOKING AT A
PAST EVENT.



WHAT DO YOU
MEAN?

WHILE THE
MONARCHS
EXIST TO
DESTROY,

THE
RULERS EXIST TO
MAINTAIN THE WORLD
AFTER THE DEATH OF
THE ABSOLUTE
BEING.

THE RULERS SENT
THEIR SOLDIERS AFTER
FINALLY TRACKING DOWN
THE MONARCHS,

BUT
EVERYTHING HAD
ALREADY COME
TO AN END BY
THEN.

THE RULERS WERE
FURIOUS AT THE FACT
THAT THE DENIZENS
OF CHAOS THEY HAD
FAILED TO CATCH...

...HAD DESTROYED
ANOTHER WORLD.



AND IN ORDER TO SET
THINGS RIGHT, THEY USED
A FORBIDDEN DEVICE
CONTAINING THE ABSOLUTE
BEING'S POWER.

IT WAS *THE CUP OF
REINCARNATION*, AN
INSTRUMENT OF GOD.



THE CUP WAS A
REMARKABLE OBJECT
THAT COULD TURN BACK
TIME BY APPROXIMATELY
10 YEARS.

THE RULERS DID
EVERYTHING THEY
COULD TO SAVE
THIS WORLD,

BUT EARTH WAS
MUCH TOO WEAK
TO FIGHT AGAINST
THE MONARCHS.


A WORLD WITHOUT
MANA COULD NOT
WITHSTAND SUCH
GARGANTUAN
BATTLES.

IT WOULDN'T HAVE MATTERED
WHETHER THE MONARCHS OR
THE RULERS WON... EARTH
WOULD'VE BEEN RAVAGED
REGARDLESS.


THE RULERS
KNEW THEY COULDN'T
SAVE EVERYONE.

SO ULTIMATELY, THEY
DECIDED TO SALVAGE
AT LEAST A PORTION OF
THE POPULATION SO THAT
LIFE ON EARTH WOULD
CONTINUE.






AND THAT'S
HOW HUNTERS
WERE BORN...?




YES, THEY CREATED
BEINGS WHO COULD
SURVIVE THE COLLISION
OF THE TWO GREAT
FORCES.

THAT IS HOW
DESPERATELY THE
RULERS WANTED TO
PROTECT MANKIND.



BEINGS WHO CAN
SURVIVE IN A CHANGED
WORLD...



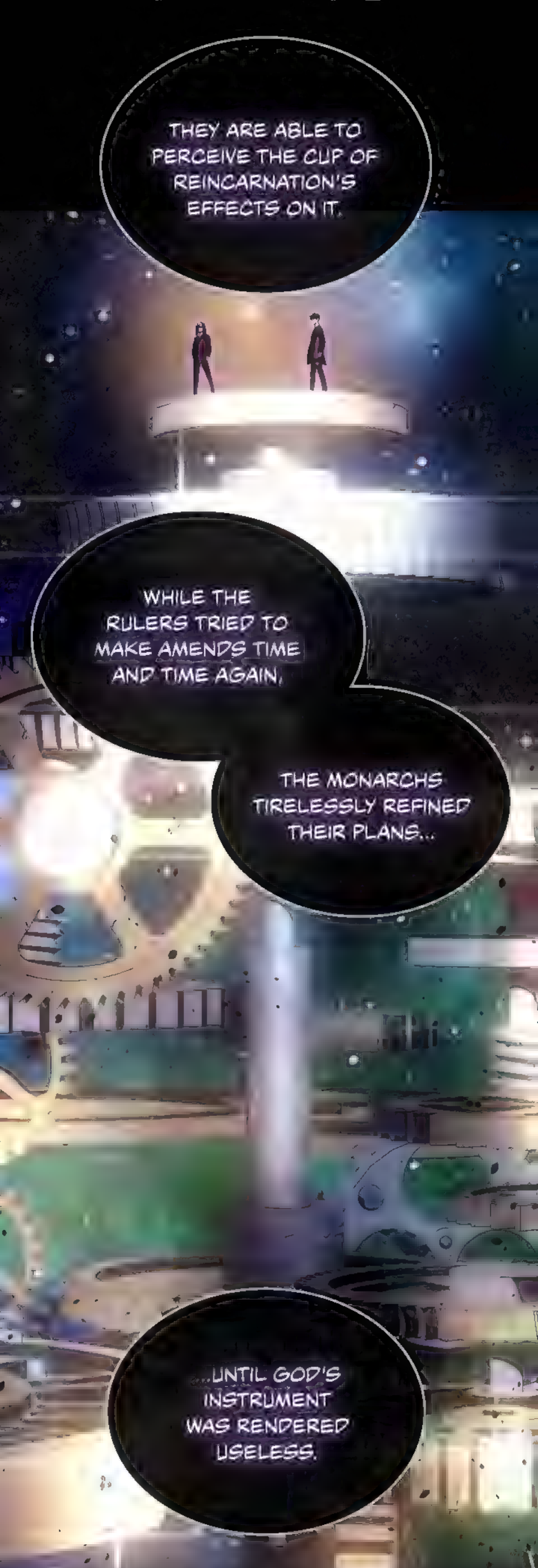
WHEN PEOPLE FIND
OUT THAT EVERYONE
EXCEPT FOR A SMALL
NUMBER OF HUNTERS
IS DOOMED TO
DIE...

...WOULD
SOCIETY BE ABLE
TO FUNCTION?

THE DEMONS'
CASTLE WAS A
MEMORY FRAGMENT
LEFT BEHIND BY
THE MONARCH OF
SHADOWS...

SO THIS
WORLD HAS ALREADY
BEEN DESTROYED
COUNTLESS
TIMES.

THAT'S CORRECT.
ALTHOUGH HIGHER
BEINGS CANNOT GO
AGAINST THE FLOW
OF TIME,

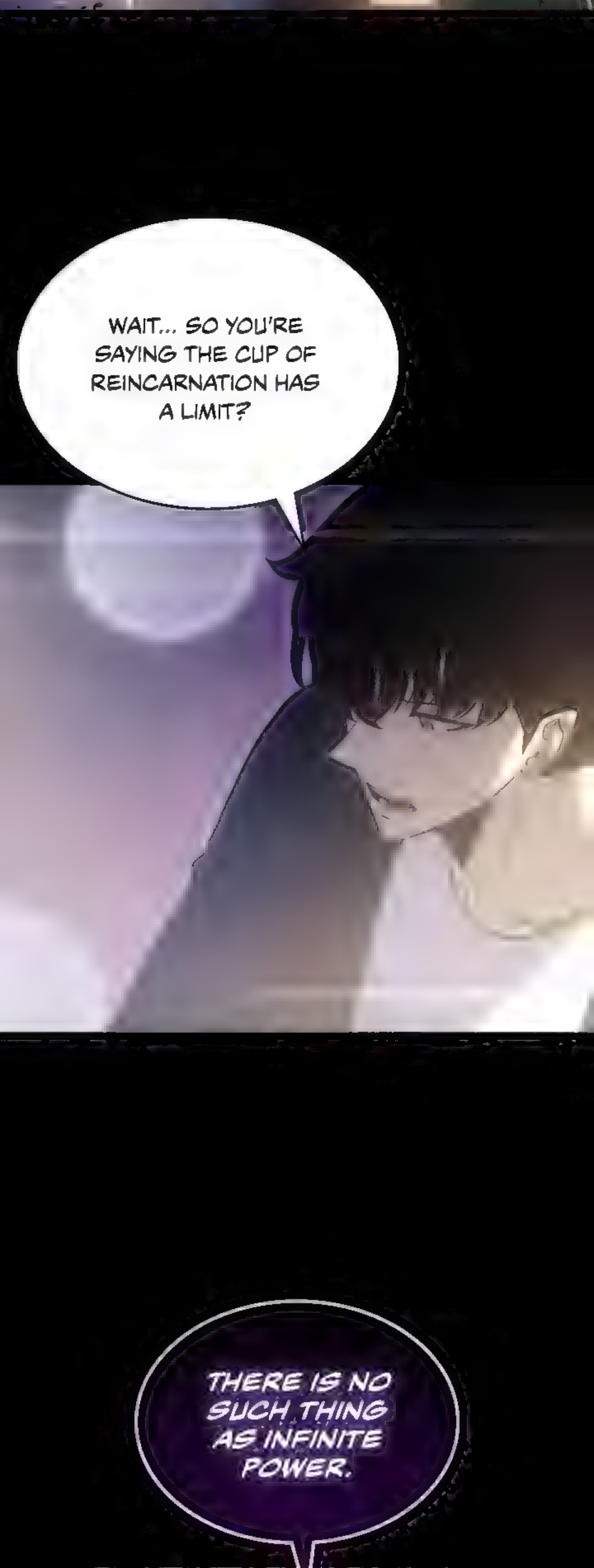


THEY ARE ABLE TO
PERCEIVE THE CLIP OF
REINCARNATION'S
EFFECTS ON IT.

WHILE THE
RULERS TRIED TO
MAKE AMENDS TIME
AND TIME AGAIN,


THE MONARCHS
TIRELESSLY REFINED
THEIR PLANS...

...UNTIL GOD'S
INSTRUMENT
WAS RENDERED
USELESS.



WAIT... SO YOU'RE
SAYING THE CLIP OF
REINCARNATION HAS
A LIMIT?


THERE IS NO
SUCH THING
AS INFINITE
POWER.



JUST LIKE HOW THE
ABSOLUTE BEING WAS
DEFEATED BY HIS OWN
CREATIONS,

ALL POWER
HAS AN END.

HOW WERE
THE ABSOLUTE BEING'S
CREATIONS ABLE TO KILL
THEIR CREATOR?



IT'S NO DIFFERENT
FROM HOW HUMANS
ARE KILLED OR HURT
BY MACHINES OF
THEIR OWN MAKING.

WE WERE
CREATED TO FIGHT,
WHICH ENDOWED
US WITH MORE THAN
ENOUGH POWER TO
OVERTHROW OUR
CREATOR.

THE MONARCHS
TOOK INSPIRATION
FROM THIS.

SIMILAR TO
HOW THE RULERS
STRENGTHENED THIS
WORLD BY LENDING
HUMANS POWER...

...AND
SCATTERING
MANA BY KILLING
MAGIC BEASTS,

THE MONARCHS
BORROWED THE
BODIES OF HUMANS
TO DESCEND UPON
EARTH...

...AND HAD THEIR
ARMY ARRIVE MUCH

ARMY ARRIVE MUCH
SOONER THAN
THE RULERS HAD
EXPECTED.

THEY PLANNED
TO USE THE MANA
DISSEMINATED BY
THE RULERS...

...TO TURN THE
ENTIRE EARTH
INTO ONE LARGE
TRAP.

IN ORDER
TO SLAUGHTER THE
RULERS' ARMY COMING
TO HELP HUMANITY IN
ONE GO...

PRECISELY.

A MONARCH POSSESSES ENORMOUS POWER, AND TO CROSS OVER INTO THIS WORLD, THEY NEED A HUMAN VESSEL THAT CAN HANDLE SUCH POWER.



IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT THE MONARCH OF DESTRUCTION AND I COULDN'T FIND A HOST.


THAT'S WHEN A SKILLED MAGE WORKING UNDER ONE OF THE KINGS CAME TO ME WITH A PROPOSAL.

HE OFFERED TO FIND ME A SUITABLE HUMAN.



AND IN RETURN,
THAT MAGE CALLED
"THE ARCHITECT" ASKED
FOR IMMORTALITY.

HOWEVER, NO LIVING
THING COULD BECOME A
VESSEL FOR "DEATH."


A top-down view of a crowd of people walking in a hallway with a tiled floor. The people are dressed in various styles of clothing, including suits, casual wear, and a school uniform. The perspective is from directly above, looking down at the crowd as they move in different directions.

THE ARCHITECT
DESIGNED A SYSTEM
TO SEARCH FOR A
HUMAN WHO WAS
HIGHLY RESPONSIVE
TO MANA...

SOMEONE WITH A
SUPERIOR PHYSIQUE
AND A STRONG
MENTALITY.


HE SEARCHED
HIGH AND LOW FOR A
VESSEL THAT COULD
BE MY COUNTERPART,
BUT THE PROCESS
WAS NOT EASY.

THAT'S WHEN
I NOTICED...

A person with dark hair, wearing a grey hoodie and blue jeans, is walking away from the viewer. They are wearing a bright yellow safety vest. They are in a crowd of other people, who are mostly out of focus. The background is a bright, hazy outdoor setting.

...A HUMAN WHO HAD STEPPED
BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES
OF THE SYSTEM THAT THE
ARCHITECT HAD CREATED. A
HUMAN WHO HAD DEVIATED
FROM ITS RULES AND
EXPECTATIONS.

YOU WERE WEAK,
AND CONSTANTLY
WITHIN DEATH'S
REACH.

A man with dark hair, wearing a brown jacket, is shouting with his mouth wide open. He is looking towards a woman with dark hair, who is wearing a pink jacket. They are in a forest with tall trees and a misty atmosphere. A large, red, spiky monster is visible in the background, looking towards the man.

YET YOU ALWAYS
MANAGED TO ESCAPE
WITH YOUR LIFE.

I WATCHED
YOU.

AND DESPITE
THE ARCHITECT'S
DISAPPROVAL, I
CHOSE YOU.

SWISH

LET ME SAY
THIS ONE MORE
TIME.

I AM THE RECORD
OF YOUR STRUGGLES,
THE EVIDENCE OF YOUR
RESISTANCE, AND THE
REWARD FOR YOUR
PAIN.



SURE, I BROKE
AWAY FROM THE
ARCHITECT'S
SCHEME,

BUT I DOUBT I WAS
STRONG ENOUGH
TO RECEIVE YOUR
POWERS.



THE ARCHITECT
MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR
YOU TO ADAPT TO MY
STRENGTH...

...USING WHAT
HUMANS DO AND
LIKE BEST.

RECREATION
AND GAMES.

THE SYSTEM
THAT WAS BUILT USING
MY POWERS GRADUALLY
CHANGED YOUR BODY TO
ACCOMMODATE ME.

DING

DING

DING

SO THAT'S WHY THE
SYSTEM WAS STRUCTURED
LIKE A VIDEO GAME AND
CALLED ME A "PLAYER."

BUT YOU
BETRAYED THE
ARCHITECT.

MONARCH
OF SHADOWS
HOW COULD
YOU DO THIS
TO US?

YOU THINK
THE OTHER
MONARCHS
WILL LET YOU
GET AWAY
WITH THIS?



WHY?


AN APOLOGY
FROM THE RULERS
VERSUS THE
BETRAYAL OF THE
MONARCHS.

AFTER PUTTING
OFF CHOOSING A
SIDE FOR QUITE
SOME TIME...



...I HAD
SIMPLY COME TO
A DECISION.

AND...



...IT WAS
A DECISION
I WANTED TO
MAKE.

SPENDING TIME
WITH YOU BROUGHT
ME SO MUCH
HAPPINESS.


PERHAPS I DID
NOT WANT TO
LOSE YOU.

I BECAME
YOU, AND YOU
BECAME ME.




FSHHH

IT WOULDN'T BE
STRANGE IF EITHER
ONE OF US BECAME
THE OWNER OF THIS
BODY.

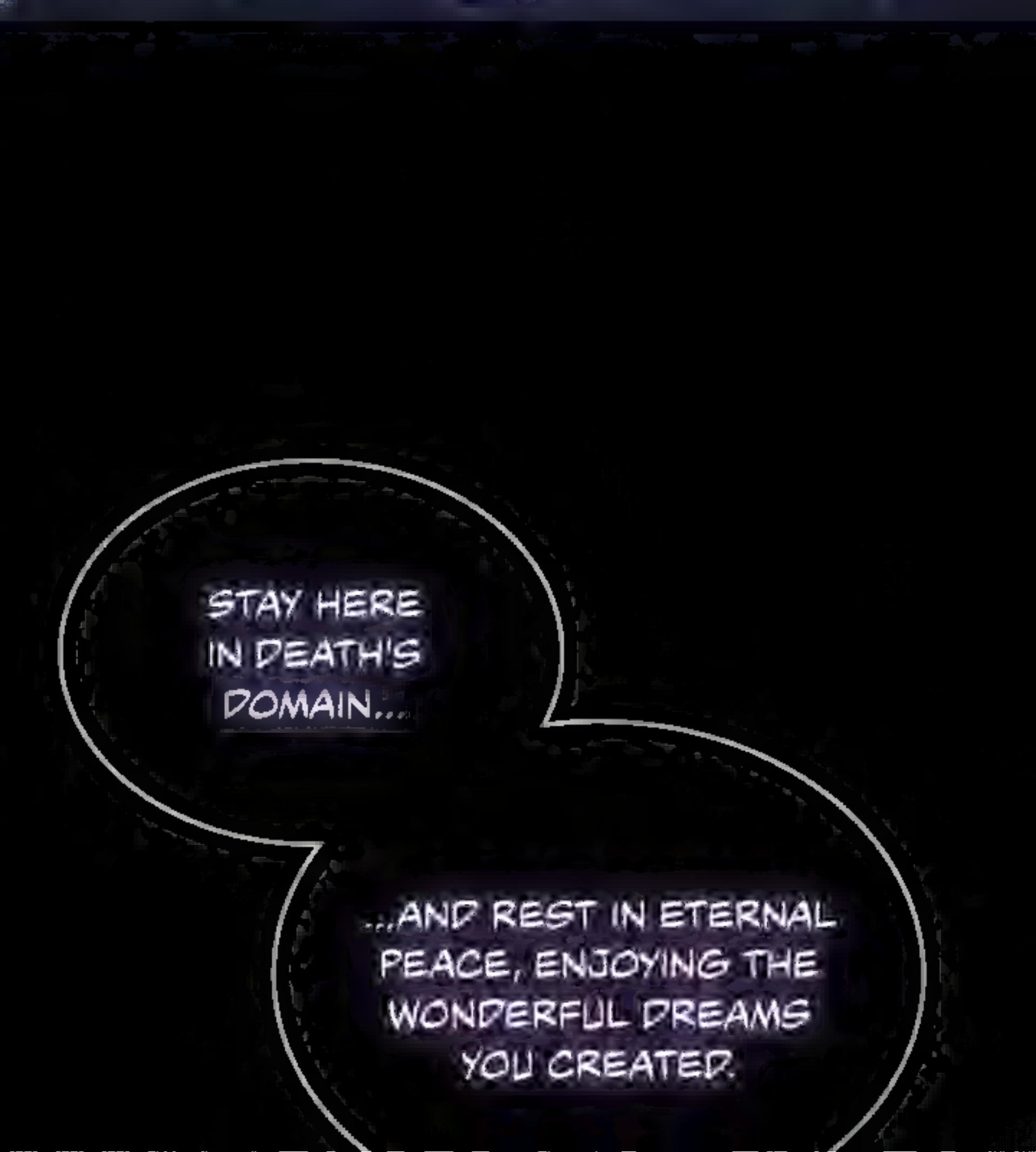


FOR WE
ARE ALREADY
ONE.



SO I'LL GIVE
YOU A CHOICE.
YOU DECIDE.

STEP




STAY HERE
IN DEATH'S
DOMAIN...

...AND REST IN ETERNAL
PEACE, ENJOYING THE
WONDERFUL DREAMS
YOU CREATED.



OR, GO BACK TO
REALITY AND FACE
YOUR FOES.






YOU SAID
YOU CAME TO A
DECISION.

BUT NOT ONLY DID
YOU NOT STAND WITH
THE RULERS,

BUT YOU NO
LONGER HAD THE WILL
TO FIGHT THEM. SO WHY
DID YOU RUN AWAY TO A
DIFFERENT WORLD WITH
THE MONARCHS?



BECAUSE THERE
WAS NO PLACE FOR
ME THERE.

*MY ANSWER IS
THE SAME.*





WILL THIS BE
THE LAST I SEE
OF YOU?



I WILL RETURN
TO MY ETERNAL REST.
BUT YOU, THE MONARCH
OF SHADOWS, WILL LIVE
AS AN IMMORTAL.

SO I DOUBT
OUR PATHS WILL
CROSS.

WITH DEATH, YOUR
POWER HAS BECOME
ABSOLUTE. THE WAY
BACK IS-



I KNOW.

BECAUSE
I AM YOU.







ARISE.

To Be Continued...

Solo
Leveling



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